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C O N F I D E N T I A L AMMAN 002483

SIPDIS

FOR IO, NEA/ELA, AND NEA/IPA

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TAGS: PREL SCUL UNESCO JO IS KWBG

SUBJECT: MFA SEES ISRAEL AS NONRESPONSIVE ON MUGHRABI GATE
ASCENT

REF: A. AMMAN 2453

- 1B. TEL AVIV 1869
- 1C. AMMAN 2147
- 1D. AMMAN 1998
- 1E. AMMAN 1483
- 1F. AMMAN 536
- 1G. AMMAN 394

Classified By: Ambassador R. Stephen Beecroft,
for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) PolOff spoke on August 25 with Ministry of Foreign Affairs Policy Planning and Research Director Omar Nahar, the MFA's pointman on the subject of a new access ramp to the Mughrabi Gate. The conversation took place days after Foreign Minister Salah Al-Bashir's convocation of the P5 and other Amman Embassies to raise GOJ concerns on the matter (Ref A).

12. (C) Nahar explained that what prompted the latest Jordanian outcry is the belief that the District Committee in Jerusalem decided in late July to go ahead with an expansion of the Western Wall plaza and to "undermine" the Islamic ruins that are part of the old ascent. As he understood matters, the period granted by the District Committee for comment has ended or is about to, and "our fear is that if that time limit expires, they'll just go ahead."

13. (C) In mid-August, per Nahar, the Jordanian MFA had approached the resident Israeli Ambassador requesting a response on whether Israel was prepared to go ahead with the Jordanian design, but had not heard anything since. "The Israelis may believe that they took our worries into consideration by amending the original design, and think 'that's that', " Nahar speculated. In Jordan's view, however, that is not enough. Jordan wants to execute its own design and believes that it has every right to - through the Jerusalem Waqf - under the terms of its 1994 treaty with Israel and based on its special historic role in Jerusalem.

14. (C) Nahar, who served for several years in Jordan's Embassy in Tel Aviv, said he was loath for Jordan to further escalate the diplomatic war of words, but "at the end of the day you have to do something. You can't sit back and take a beating from public opinion." Note: Nahar did not elaborate on what exactly "something" would entail, but suggested there might be an attempt to further internationalize the issue. End Note. Nahar said he understood the domestic pressure the Israeli government faces, especially in the face of upcoming elections for leadership of the ruling Kadima Party, but said Israel needs to be sensitive to Jordan's concerns as well. He cited a host of articles critical of Israel's plans (some of which suggest that Israel will damage the underpinning of the Al-Aqsa Mosque with its construction). Thus Jordan seeks U.S. intervention. "You are the only people we talk to so openly about this issue. I've never dedicated so much time

to one issue with any other government," he concluded.

¶4. (C) Comment: Neither Nahar's evaluation of the situation nor the Foreign Minister's talking points when he demarched the P5 on August 21 are new to us (Refs C-G). The Jordanians have consistently complained that Israel has largely ignored their equities on the Mughrabi Gate issue, and have bypassed the UNESCO and World Heritage Committee process by moving ahead unilaterally. But at the core of the Jordanian position is that focusing on whatever improvement Israel has done or might do to the plans misses the point: Jordan wants to design and build the new ascent, wants to pay for it, and thinks that if Israel does it there will be problems. End Comment

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